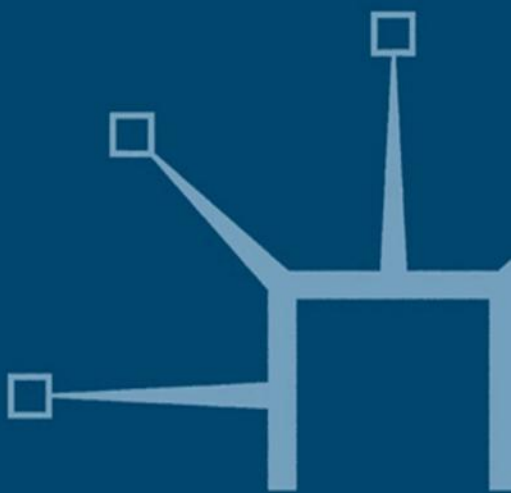# Spinoza on Monism

Philip Goff

3
Why the World Has Parts: Reply to Horgan and Potrč

Jonathan Schaffer

> [The parts] are not the whole reality but they are real in them-
> selves, and it is only our imperfection as finites which conceals
> from us partially their true nature; how that is they are delimited
> against each other in Space-Time … The One is the system of the
> Many in which they are conserved not the vortex in which they are
> engulfed. (Alexander 1950: 347)

In 'Monism: The Priority of the Whole,' I proposed to revive the classical
monistic tradition, in part by arguing that its dismissal was based on a
misinterpretation. I argued that the classical monists were not defending
the seemingly crazy view that only the one whole exists, but rather were
defending the more sensible view that the one whole is ontologically prior
to its many proper parts (which presupposes that the one whole and its
many proper parts all exist). Taking it as obvious that many things exist
(you and I, one hand and then another, etc.), I claimed that there remains
an interesting question of what depends on what, with some plausible argu-
ments for the monistic idea that the one whole is more fundamental, with
its many proper parts existing as dependent fragments of an integrated
substance.

In 'Existence Monism Trumps Priority Monism,' Terry Horgan and Matjaž
Potrč aim to show that the view that only the one whole exists is neither
so crazy nor so easy to dismiss. They argue that the view that only the
one whole exists (*existence monism*) is actually preferable to the monistic
view that I considered both more sensible and more historically accurate, on
which the one whole is viewed as more fundamental than its many proper
parts (*priority monism*).[1]

Horgan and Potrč prefer existence monism on grounds of *parsimony*, for
doing without any of the many proper parts. But their main focus is on
vagueness. For the main reason for regarding priority monism as more sen-
sible is that it respects truisms such as Moore's (1993: 166): 'Here is one
hand, and here is another.' Horgan and Potrč reply that considerations of

vagueness preclude any 'ontological vindication' of such truisms, and would thus deny the advantage to priority monism. Instead they sketch an austere *contextual semantics*, on which truisms can come out true in contexts where the 'standards for correspondence to reality' are sufficiently lax, given only that the cosmos is suitable. They would thus deny that existence monism is crazy, on the grounds that it can still respect truisms, at least in lax enough contexts.

Overview: In §1 I will discuss vagueness and argue that priority monism remains the more sensible view. Given iterated supervaluationism (which Horgan and Potrč allow as viable) the many proper parts are needed to provide the extensions. Then in §2 I will discuss parsimony and argue that priority monism remains preferable. Horgan and Potrč require a more complicated and obscure semantics, without any compensating parsimony for primitive entities. While I admire Horgan and Potrč's bold attempt to revive existence monism, I must conclude that priority monism remains the more sensible (and historically accurate) form of monism.

My debate with Horgan and Potrč is primarily an internecine debate amongst monists. That said, it may be of interest to those who would oppose monism, if only to know the best form of what they would oppose. It may also have more general interest for connecting to the more general question of whether derivative entities are needed. This is a question that arises in a range of partially analogous debates, such as between the priority pluralist who thinks that mereological wholes exist as dependent entities and the 'conciliatory' mereological nihilist pluralist who would still respect truisms, and between the non-reductive physicalist who thinks that chemical compounds and biological organisms exist as dependent entities and the eliminative physicalist who would still try to sustain chemical and biological truths.

3.1   Vagueness and ontology

3.1.1   The Moorean argument for priority monism

Horgan and Potrč argue that considerations of vagueness preclude the priority monist from claiming the more sensible view. It will help to begin with a statement of the argument for priority monism being the more sensible view. Here is the argument I have in mind, which I will call *the Moorean argument for priority monism*:

1. Moore's claim ('Here is one hand, and here is another') is true
2. If Moore's claim is true, then there are proper parts to the cosmos
3. Thus there are proper parts to the cosmos

The argument is evidently valid, and its conclusion 3 conflicts with existence but not priority monism.

The existence monist could deny premise 1. She might then supply some paraphrase of Moore's claim which she accepts as true (perhaps: 'The cosmos is such that it seems as if here is one hand and here is another'), together with some error theory explaining why we confuse Moore's claim with the supplied paraphrase in judging what is true. But Horgan and Potrč's would accept 1. For they explicitly accept commonsensical truisms as true, and indeed they (2008: 3) render the third core semantic thesis of their austere realism as: 'Numerous statements and thought-contents involving common sense and science are true, even though the correct ontology does not include these posits.'

So, given that the inference to 3 is valid and that premise 1 is accepted, Horgan and Potrč must rebut 2 (or fail to address the argument). And so, if considerations of vagueness are to preclude the priority monist from claiming the more sensible view via the Moorean argument, they must do so by undermining 2.

3.1.2   Background assumption: iterated supervaluationism

What if any bearing considerations of vagueness have on 2 depends on how vagueness is understood. To this I now turn. Horgan and Potrč's (pp. 54–6) discussion of vagueness begins from Horgan's (1995, 2010) 'transvaluational' view, on which vagueness arises from the normative pull of logically incoherent principles governing the assignment of statuses across sorites sequences. This is said to entail that ontological vagueness is impossible, and also that views (including epistemicism and non-iterated versions of supervaluationism) are unacceptable for imputing sharp 'status transitions' to sorites sequences. I propose to accept all of this *arguendo*. Iterated supervaluationism is explicitly allowed as viable (p. 4; c.f. 2008: 83), so I propose to simply adopt iterated supervaluationism.

A brief and informal sketch of iterated supervaluationism may prove useful.[2] Iterated supervaluationism involves four core components. First, vagueness is understood as a particular sort of *semantic indecision*, in which certain object-language terms have only *partial extensions*. These terms admit of different 'admissible precisifications' in the meta-language (admissible for getting the clear cases right and preserving penumbral connections), which are different ways of making the further semantic decisions that would yield full extensions.

Secondly, the metalanguage itself is a vague language, since 'being an admissible precisification' is itself a vague phrase. So there will be admissible precisifications of 'being an admissible precisification,' which are themselves amenable to multiple admissible precisifications at the next level up, *ad infinitum*. So the iterated supervaluationist posits an infinite hierarchy of vague languages. (This is the sense in which the supervaluationism is 'iterated,' and the way in which higher-order vagueness is accommodated.) Thus if '*t*' is a vague phrase of the object-language, 'being

an admissible precisification of '*t*'' will be a vague phrase of the meta-language, and 'being an admissible precisification of 'being an admissible precisification of '*t*''' will be a vague phrase of the meta-meta-language, *ad infinitum*. (This point will be stressed by Horgan and Potrč: there is vagueness all the way up.)

Thirdly, accompanying this infinite hierarchy of vague languages is an abundant background ontology of precise objects (e.g. various fusions of particles), which are what the various candidate extensions draw upon. If '*t*' is a vague phrase of a given *n*-level language, then '*t*' will be assigned a plurality of admissible precisifications in the *n*+1-level meta-language, which associate '*t*' with different extensions *over the many precise objects in the background ontology*. (This point will provide my reply: the many proper parts of the cosmos are still needed for the various candidate extensions to draw upon; the one cosmos alone would not provide the semantics with enough extensions.)

Fourthly, the iterated hierarchy of vague languages and the abundant background ontology can then be used to characterize various truth-like and reference-like notions including those of *super-truth* and *super-reference*. Super-truth is the notion of truth under all admissible precisifications one level up. Associated with the notion of super-truth is the operator 'Definitely,' which serves to express the *n*+1-level status of super-truth in the *n*-level language. Super-truth remains a vague notion: 'Definitely *s*' does not entail 'Definitely Definitely *s*.' The notion of super-truth is connected with the notion of *super-reference*, which holds one–many between a referring term and the plurality of its admissible referents one level up. A term '*t*' super-refers to the *Xs* if and only if the *Xs* are all and only the admissible referents for '*t*.' Super-reference likewise remains a vague notion: ''*t*' super-refers to the *Xs*' does not entail 'Definitely '*t*' super-refers to the *Xs*.'

With iterated supervaluationism adopted for the sake of the argument, the question thus becomes: does iterated supervaluationism undermine 2?

3.1.3 Horgan and Potrč's puzzling trilemma

Why might Horgan and Potrč think that iterated supervaluationism undermines 2, or makes any trouble for the priority monist's claim to provide the more sensible monism? Horgan and Potrč aim for a trilemma, with the following options described in their terminology (*warning*: I am about to complain that their terminology is misleading):

- Provide a 'fully ontological vindication' of Moore's claim
- Provide a 'partially ontological vindication' of Moore's claim
- Provide a 'non-ontological vindication' of Moore's claim

In this vein they (p. 65; c.f. pp. 73–4) describe their strategy as 'first to argue by elimination for the non-ontological vindication program by explaining

why neither of the other alternative vindication programs (fully ontological or partially ontological) is viable,' and then to argue from the non-ontological vindication program to the preferability of existence monism.

By a 'fully ontological vindication' Horgan and Potrč (pp. 58–59) mean an ontology that posits exactly one entity per referring term, thereby positing a one–one correspondence between language and reality. (They (p. 58) also speak of this as a 'direct-correspondence' conception.) This would require, in the case of Moore's claim, that there be a one–one correspondence between, e.g., the term 'hand' and some unique ontological posit (the one real hand). They are right to rule this out: no supervaluationist will endorse such a fixed one–one correspondence between language and reality. Rather the supervaluationist will posit *many* admissible precisifications of the term 'hand.' And so the prospect of a 'fully ontological vindication' is said (p. 59) to be eliminated: 'Since ontological vagueness is impossible, fully ontological vindication of ordinary-object claims is not to be had. Metaphysicians must learn to live with this sobering conclusion.'

By a 'partially ontological vindication' Horgan and Potrč (p. 59) mean an ontology that posits many entities per referring term, thereby positing a one–many correspondence between language and reality. (They (p. 60) also speak of this as an 'indirect form of correspondence.') This would require, in the case of Moore's claim, that there be a one–many correspondence between, e.g., the term 'hand' and some plurality of ontological posits (the many apt hand candidates). They are perhaps right to rule this out as well: no *iterated* supervaluationalist will endorse any fixed one–many correspondence between language and reality. The iterated supervaluationist will posit many admissible precisifications of the term 'hand,' but will equally posit many admissible precisifications of 'admissible precisification of the term 'hand'', and so on up the hierarchy. This is just to say (as explained in §1.2) that for the iterated supervaluationist, super-truth and super-reference remain vague notions. It remains vague which are the apt hand candidates. And so Horgan and Potrč (p. 66) say: 'the program of partially ontological vindication of ordinary-object claims comes to grief,' since vagueness is never discharged but just pushed up the infinite hierarchy of languages:

> Under [iterated supervaluationism], genuine vagueness in language and thought is evidently accommodated via the use of vague categories in the metalanguage, but now the vague claims in the metalanguage are themselves just as much in need of vindication as are the vague claims in the object language. So, since the claims in the metalanguage are as yet unvindicated themselves, these claims do not confer vindication upon the ordinary-object claims in the object language.[3]

I propose to grant Horgan and Potrč the arguments against 'fully ontological' and 'partially ontological' vindication, but think it crucial to peel away

their misleading jargon. All that I am granting, given iterated supervaluationism, is the following:

- There is no one–one correspondence between language and reality
- There is no one–many correspondence between language and reality

Phrased in this clearer way, it should be evident that there is a huge gap between these claims and the conclusion that ontological posits (e.g. the many proper parts of the cosmos) have no role whatsoever to play in vindicating Moore's claim. (I will explain the role they play in §1.4.) So I think that the trick must have come in the labelling: by calling these first two options 'fully ontological vindication' and 'partially ontological vindication,' a false suggestion was implanted to the effect that if there is neither 'full' nor 'partial' ontological vindication there must be none at all.

(I may be asked: am I granting that a 'non-ontological vindication' of Moore's claim is enough as per Horgan and Potrč's third remaining option, or am I maintaining that they have missed a fourth option intermediate between a 'partially ontological vindication' and a 'non-ontological vindication', perhaps that of a 'semi-partially ontological vindication'? I have no idea. This is not my terminology, and I find it confusing at best. I am about to explain why – given iterated supervaluationism – the proper parts play a crucial role in accounting for the truth of Moore's claim, without there being any one–one or one–many correspondence. By my lights Horgan and Potrč's terminology does not usefully characterize this role, and so is best abandoned.)

Returning to the crucial premise 2, and avoiding potentially misleading terminology, the question becomes: does the lack of either a one–one or a one–many correspondence between language and reality in any way undermine 2?

3.1.4   Key reply: the role of the many proper parts

As explained above (§1.2), the iterated supervaluationist invokes an abundant background ontology of precise objects (e.g. various fusions of particles), which are what the various candidate extensions draw upon. *The role of the proper parts of the cosmos is evident: they provide the needed extensions.* Without them some such further entities iterated supervaluationism would not have extensions enough to get the right truth values. Indeed this is a point that Horgan and Potrč (p. 62) explicitly acknowledge in describing iterated supervaluationism as 'ontologically opulent indirect correspondence' and explaining: 'Ontologically opulent indirect correspondence requires the presence, in the right ontology, of items that are eligible candidate-referents for ordinary-object positing expressions; …'

As such it should be clear why iterated supervaluationism supports rather than undermines 2 (despite implementing neither a one–one nor a

one–many correspondence between language and reality). Recall that the contention of 2 is that *if Moore's claim is true, then there are proper parts to the cosmos*. Iterated supervaluationism – by requiring an abundant background ontology of precise objects to provide extensions – directly supports this contention. For if Moore's claim is true, then there must be various candidate extensions assigned to 'hand.' On the reasonable assumptions that the cosmos is not an admissible referent for this phrase, and that an admissible referent would need to be a proper part of the cosmos instead, proper parts of the cosmos are required. This should settle the status of the Moorean argument for priority monism, given that 1 is accepted and iterated supervaluationism assumed: *the argument is sound*.[4]

Indeed the following *iterated supervaluationist argument for priority monism* looks like a compelling argument, using premises that Horgan and Potrč allow:

4. Iterated supervaluationism is the right semantic treatment of vague discourse
5. Iterated supervaluationism requires many precise objects (to provide extensions)
6. Thus the right semantic treatment of vague discourse requires many precise objects

And so existence monism – which only posits the one whole – conflicts with what is required by the right semantic treatment of vague discourse. Thus I must conclude that iterated supervaluationism directly favours the priority form of monism. End of story.

Returning to Horgan and Potrč's discussion, it is worth looking further into what they say about 'non-ontological vindication' (the one remaining option they take to be open). Their (p. 74) objection to priority monism plus 'non-ontological vindication' runs as follows:

> [T]his kind of priority monism faces the following awkward problem: there is no obvious theoretical role to be played, in the ontology, by all those ontologically precise objects that are supposed to be proper parts of the whole cosmos…[5]

I hope my reply is clear. There is an obvious theoretical role to be played by the proper parts of the cosmos within iterated supervaluationism (a role Horgan and Potrč themselves acknowledge): *the proper parts are needed to provide extensions*.

The dispute between the existence monist and the priority monist concerns whether there are many proper parts of the cosmos, and hence the relevant question is simply: *must one recognize the many proper parts of the cosmos to vindicate ordinary truisms?* Given iterated supervaluationism, the

answer to this question is an immediate *yes*, since with just the one whole one cannot construct the right extensions. Any question which receives a different answer (e.g. *is there is a partially ontological vindication of ordinary-object claims in the offing?*) must not be the relevant question.

3.1.5   Conclusions on vagueness and ontology

To summarize, the Moorean argument for priority monism (as given by 1–3) looks sound. Horgan and Potrč seem committed to denying premise 2, but the iterated supervaluationist approach which they allow supports rather than undermines 2. As such I do not see how Horgan and Potrč touch the argument. Horgan and Potrč should take this as an invitation to say what they think is wrong with the Moorean argument as stated.

Moreover, the iterated supervaluationist argument for priority monism (4–6) looks sound as well (given iterated supervaluationism). Horgan and Potrč's trilemma is an artifact of misleading labelling. They are right that neither a 'fully ontological vindication' nor a 'partially ontological vindication' is possible given iterated supervaluationism, but wrong to infer that no role for ontological posits remains. (I leave it open whether that means that they are wrong to infer that a 'non-ontological vindication' is all that remains, or wrong to infer that all forms of 'non-ontological vindication' deny a theoretical role for ontological posits.) Iterated supervaluationism requires the many proper parts of the cosmos to provide the right extensions, as per 5. Horgan and Potrč are invited to explain what they think is wrong with the iterated supervaluationist argument.

I have granted *arguendo* that iterated supervaluationism is the right treatment of vagueness, but it is worth peering beyond this assumption. For on ontological treatments of vagueness there would need to be entities in the ontology – hands and their ilk – to be what is vague. And on epistemic treatments of vagueness there would likewise need to be entities in the ontology to bear the precise but unknowable boundaries. So existence monism is not merely incompatible with iterated supervaluationism, it is incompatible with virtually every major alternative. (Indeed on both ontological and epistemic conceptions of vagueness, the priority monist could claim a precise one–one correspondence between language and reality: a 'fully ontological vindication.') The priority monist's success with vagueness is thus not a mere artifact of iterated supervaluationism, but extends to any standard treatment consonant with a *referential* view of language. For on any referential view of language, Moore's claim will require, e.g., some sort of referent(s) for 'hand.'

That said, there is one remaining view of vagueness that is consistent with existence monism: Horgan and Potrč's own preferred contextual semantics. They (pp. 62–4) advocate an austere program of 'non-ontological vindication' involving 'ontologically austere indirect correspondence,' which foregoes a referential view of language. Essentially they posit a many–one

correspondence between language and reality, where reality contains just the one cosmos, but the truisms may still count as true given the way the cosmos is, relative to contexts permitting relatively indirect correspondence with reality. So they hold that Moore's claim about hands can still be true in lax enough contexts, provided only that the cosmos is suitable. With contextual semantics in hand, Horgan and Potrč would have an answer to the Moorean argument for priority monism (rejecting 2) and to the iterated supervaluationist argument (rejecting 4).

As such I see one last move open to Horgan and Potrč. They might leave considerations of vagueness aside, and grant (*pace* p. 74–75) that there is a stable package of priority monism plus iterated supervaluationism, with the many proper parts of the cosmos granted the theoretical role of providing extensions. But they can still try to argue that their package of existence monism plus contextual semantics is overall better than the package of priority monism plus iterated supervaluationism. Here they might appeal to *parsimony*, praising their package for doing without any of the many proper parts.

3.2   Parsimony and derivativeness

3.2.1   Horgan and Potrč's argument from ontological parsimony

Horgan and Potrč argue that considerations of ontological parsimony favor existence monism. Existence monism might be thought more parsimonious in at least three respects. First, existence monism involves a strictly leaner ontology, with a proper subset of the entities that priority monism involves. Existence monism does without any of the many proper parts. Second, the existence monist can also claim to do without any relation of ontological priority. As Horgan and Potrč (p. 74) explain:

> By embracing existence monism one eliminates from ontology two kinds of un-needed theoretical baggage: not only the putative, ontologically precise, objects that are proper parts of the whole cosmos, but also the putative relation of ontological priority between the cosmos and those putative proper parts. Yet more reason to embrace existence monism, on grounds of yet more comparative theoretical simplicity.

They might also have added, as a third respect of parsimony, that the existence monist (*qua* mereological nihilist) can also claim to do without any relation of proper parthood.

Horgan and Potrč could equally argue that these three respects of ontological parsimony favor the package of existence monism plus contextual semantics over the package of priority monism plus iterated supervaluationism. (This was the move I suggested on their behalf at the close

of §1.) Thus *the parsimony argument for existence monism* might be phrased as per:

7. The package of existence monism plus contextual semantics is more ontologically parsimonious than the package of priority monism plus iterated supervaluationism
8. The more ontologically parsimonious package is (all else equal) the better package
9. Hence existence monism plus contextual semantics is (all else equal) the better package

The argument is evidently valid, and its conclusion 9 favours the package of existence monism plus contextual semantics, provided that all else is equal.

3.2.2   First reply: trading ontological for semantic complexity

I have two independent replies to offer to the parsimony argument for existence monism, the first of which is that *all else is not equal*: Horgan and Potrč pay for any ontological simplicity with a more complicated and obscure semantics. (This is to say that even if 9 is true, the package of existence monism plus contextual semantics is still not better overall.) Obviously a gain in ontological parsimony need not correspond to any overall gain in 'comparative theoretical simplicity' if it is paid for in ideological profligacy or other complexities. Ontological parsimony is not the only aspect of simplicity, and moreover simplicity is not the only methodological virtue.

Horgan and Potrč package their existence monism with an austere contextual semantics so as not to fall afoul of Moorean truisms (§1.5). But their contextual semantics is highly underdescribed. They provide nothing by way of semantic clauses. They (p. 63; c.f. 2006: 146) mention the idea that the truth-conditions for a given claim will be given by a range of possible worlds (or possible ways for the world to be), and that the way the cosmos is might or might not put it in this range. But no discussion of the *compositional determination* of these possible worlds truth-conditions is offered, which is where matters of reference to proper parts of the cosmos are standardly thought to arise. Thus they do not address how 'Here is one hand, and here is another' might have a possible worlds truth-condition without treating, e.g., 'hand' as a referring term.[6]

Horgan and Potrč do posit a parameter of context: the degree to which a given claim must correspond to reality. But no empirical motivation for this semantic posit is provided. Indeed I am not even sure I understand the idea of 'the degree' of correspondence with reality. Moreover, they provide virtually no rules for evaluating this parameter on a given occasion, and say virtually nothing about how to assess a proposition as against a given setting of this parameter. (They also introduce an error theory for 'scorekeeping

confusions' to explain why people continue to think of tables and chairs as real in even the strictest context, without empirical support.)

At this point it should be evident that Horgan and Potrč pay for any ontological simplification with a more complex and obscure semantics. Indeed by my lights they have just swept all the complications under the semantic carpet. If they do not (and will not) articulate the clauses of their semantics, I do not see how *any* overall conclusions as to 'comparative theoretical simplicity' can be drawn. Indeed I do not think that the package of existence monism plus contextual semantics is sufficiently developed in its semantic aspect to even enter the competition.[7]

3.2.3 Second reply: ontological parsimony reconsidered

My second (independent) reply to the argument from parsimony is that I do not think that Horgan and Potrč have actually achieved any real gain in ontological parsimony, properly understood. That is to say, I independently think that 7 is false. Horgan and Potrč have not merely complicated and obscured the semantics (§2.2), they have done so for nothing. My views on parsimony are admittedly unorthodox. Occam's Razor tells us not to multiply entities without necessity, and that seems to speak in favor of doing without any of the many proper parts if possible. But I think that Occam's Razor needs revision to distinguish *fundamental* entities from *derivative* entities. On my view multiplication of derivative entities is no methodological sin (c.f. Schaffer 2007: 189; 2009: 361). What is to be avoided (*ceteris paribus*) is the multiplication of fundamental entities. It is only *primitives* that count against parsimony.

With respect to posited fundamental entities the existence monist and the priority monist have no disagreement at all: the one whole cosmos is the one and only fundamental entity. Hence I would say that both views are equally ontologically parsimonious, once the right measure of parsimony is employed. Thus what is at issue as to 7 is the right precept for ontological parsimony, as between:

• Do not multiply entities without necessity
• Do not multiply fundamental entities without necessity

How might one decide on the right measure of parsimony? The best recourse, it seems to me, is to look to the analogous notion of *conceptual simplicity*. Thus imagine that one has two theories to consider concerning a common domain. The first theory requires seven conceptual primitives, and uses these primitives to define an additional 43 derived concepts. The second theory gets by with just a single conceptual primitive, and uses this primitive to define all of the 50 concepts of the first theory plus an additional 49 useful concepts to boot. I take it as evident that – at least with respect to conceptual simplicity – it is the second theory that is vastly superior. The

second theory – on the basis of a single conceptual primitive – has managed to define 100 concepts. This is an incredibly simple and strong theory. Its simplicity consists in its getting by with just a single primitive concept, and its strength consists in its ability to define 100 concepts on this slender basis. The first theory, by way of contrast, is neither as simple (requiring seven primitives rather than one) nor as strong (able to characterize only 50 concepts rather than 100).

In the case of conceptual simplicity, it should then be clear that we measure by the number of primitive undefined concepts, and not by the total number of (primitive or defined) concepts. For only that measure fits the evident truth that the second theory above is simpler than the first. Indeed if one did measure by the total number of (primitive or defined) concepts, one would reach the perverse conclusion that the first theory – with only 50 concepts – is 'simpler' than the second, with its 100 concepts.

Or – to take a case even more analogous to the current situation – imagine a first theory that employs a single conceptual primitive but refuses to define any further notions, and a second theory that employs the very same conceptual primitive but then puts this primitive to work in defining 100 further notions. It should be evident that these theories are equal in conceptual simplicity, insofar as they both posit exactly the same single conceptual primitive. The second theory though is clearly preferable, insofar as it is stronger. The second theory provides more 'bang for the buck' than the first theory. In this case the 'buck' is the same (the same primitive concept), but the 'bang' is greater on the second theory.[8]

It is true that in this special case just mooted the first theorist might claim the special 'virtue' of eliminating the relation of definability altogether. But that hardly seems to help the credibility of the first theory in any way. A conceptual system that lacks the power to define anything further should only be condemned. It would be perverse to make a virtue of eliminating the notion of definability, to defend such a weak proposal. Overall it seems to me that relations of definability form part of the fixed background against which conceptual simplicity is measured, and that a theory that refuses to see such relations gains no special credit by the lights of a measure that presupposes such relations.

Given that conceptual simplicity should be measured by the number of primitive concepts (and that overall virtuous methodology in the conceptual realm is governed by a 'bang for the buck' principle), it seems to me most reasonable to extend an analogous style of treatment to ontological parsimony, via a *bang for the buck* ontological precept:

> An ontological system should optimally balance simplicity and strength, positing as few fundamental entities as possible (simplicity), grounding as many derivative entities as possible (strength).

Priority monism is clearly more methodologically virtuous than existence monism by the lights of bang for the buck methodology, since both theories are equally parsimonious – both posit exactly the same single ontological fundament, namely the cosmos – but priority monism is stronger. The existence monist has perversely refused to put her fundament to work in deriving further entities. (Of course the existence monist also can claim the special 'virtues' of eliminating the relations of priority and parthood altogether. But this seems just as non-virtuous as the analogous claim to eliminate the notion of definability made on behalf of the theory that lacked the power to define anything.)

3.2.4   Conclusions on parsimony and derivativeness

To summarize, I have argued that Horgan and Potrč's preferred package of existence monism plus contextual semantics is methodologically inferior to the package of priority monism plus iterated supervaluationism, in two independent respects. First, their package merely trades ontological simplicity for semantic complexity and obscurity. So as to 'comparative theoretical simplicity,' I think that there is only one theory that is even eligible for comparison: the package of priority monism plus iterated supervaluationism should win by default. Horgan and Potrč should take this as an invitation to say *much more* about their contextual semantics, to the point where it may be properly compared with the elegant and well-articulated iterated supervaluationist semantics already on offer.

Second, their package does not even achieve a genuine gain in ontological parsimony (they have just complicated and obscured the semantics for nothing). They in no way minimize the number of *fundamental* entities posited. Moreover, their approach merely represents a *weakening* of the strength of the priority monistic approach: they get less bang for the same buck. They refuse to use their fundament to find the derivative entities (the many proper parts) that are there for the finding. Horgan and Potrč should take this as an invitation to discuss the right underlying measure of parsimony.

Bringing all of this together, I have argued that the package of priority monism plus iterated supervaluationism is preferable to the package of existence monism plus contextual semantics, for the following two reasons:

- The semantics of iterated supervaluationism is elegant and well-articulated, in contrast to contextual semantics which seems extremely complex and remains (at present) highly obscure
- The ontology of priority monism gets more bang for the same buck as does the ontology of existence monism

For whatever it is worth, priority monism packaged with well-articulated ontological or epistemic treatments of vagueness would equally enjoy these

twin comparative advantages. As such I must conclude that priority monism remains the more sensible (and historically accurate) form of monism.[9]

Notes

1. Horgan and Potrč's defense of existence monism is a defense of one aspect of their (2000, 2008) *austere realism*. Existence monism corresponds to the first of their (2008: 3) 'Blobjectivist Ontological Theses,' which reads: 'There is really just one concrete particular, namely, the whole universe (the blobject).'

2. A more formal presentation would involve the notion of a partial model, and Fine's (1975) notion of a rooted specification space, characterizing possible extension paths for partial models.

3. In the main text I will grant this argument, but I am not certain it succeeds. Horgan and Potrč are right that, for the iterated supervaluationist, every level retains vague phrases. But it does not follow, from the fact that every level retains vague phrases, that vagueness is not discharged *at the limit*. The iterated supervaluationist might thus try to characterize notions of *omega-truth* and *omega-reference* that characterize admissibility all the way up the hierarchy (technically: at the edges of specification space, at which all semantic decisions have been made), perhaps via infinite blocks of 'Definitely' operators. Such 'omega' notions will not characterize any given level, but rather characterize a transcendent 'limit perspective' on the hierarchy at which point all vagueness is discharged (all semantic decisions are made). If so then the 'omega' notions might still back a 'partially ontological vindication,' should one be wanted. But I will not pursue this idea further.

4. Iterated supervaluationism requires many precise objects to provide admissible referents for terms like 'hand,' but does not require that these be proper parts of the cosmos. That is a further claim, albeit one which strikes me as independently reasonable. That said, there is room for intermediate views between existence monism and priority monism, which accept many precise entities (contra existence monism) but deny that they are proper parts of the cosmos (contra priority monism). Indeed, Guigon (this volume; c.f. Della Rocca 2008: ch. 2) provides impressive historical evidence for interpreting Spinoza as having held such an intermediate view, on which the many are the modes of the one substance, but modes are not parts of substances (Guigon details a fictionalist interpretation of Spinoza's talk of parts). Such a view, which Guigon labels substance monism, can accept both premise 1 of the Moorean argument and iterated supervaluationism, but still deny 2 by having the modes provide the extensions. Such a view is definitely worthy of further discussion, but falls beyond the scope of the present one.

5. Likewise in a first engagement with my views, Horgan and Potrč (2008: 188-9) write: '[T]here would be very little theoretical *need* for [the many parts] if 'the one whole'... is really ontologically basic. So if indeed the one whole is metaphysically basic, then it is also metaphysically exclusionary: the right ontology is blobjectivism.'

6. On this point I follow Korman (2008): '[Horgan and Potrč] lack the resources in their ontology to help themselves to any known compositional semantics in accounting for the truth of ordinary utterances about composite objects.'

7. The most I have seen elsewhere from Horgan and Potrč (2008: 37) is talk of 'contextually operative standards for semantic correctness' and (2008: 51) invocation of 'implicit, contextually variable, semantic parameters.' Indeed, elsewhere

Horgan and Potrč (2006: 157) invoke the view of 'quasi-particularist semantic normativity,' which rejects the burden of answering questions about the general semantics principles operative in a given context, or across contexts. Instead they (2006: 159) rest with semantic supervenience claims that 'are not systematizable in terms of compact, general, exceptionless, cognitively surveyable principles.'

8. Another way to put the point: it does not in any way count *against* the conceptual simplicity of certain primitives if one discovers that one can use these primitives to define a further concept. If anything such a discovery counts in favor of the strength (or fruitfulness) of such primitives.

9. Thanks to Philip Goff, Ghislain Guigon, Terry Horgan, Brian McLaughlin, Matjaž Potrč and the students in my Spring 2011 metaphysics seminar for helpful discussion.

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